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Approved For Release 2007/03/07 : CIA-RDP79T00826A000500010072-1

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

Memorandum



THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
12 April 1966

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
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ARMY review(s) completed.

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State Dept. review completed

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HIGHLIGHTS

A heavy Viet Cong mortar attack on Tan Son Nhut Air Base apparently has inflicted heavy US casualties and major damage to aircraft and facilities; three lesser enemy sabotage/terrorist attacks have taken place elsewhere. Meanwhile, the government-sponsored National Political Congress convened but was boycotted by Buddhist Institute representatives and the Catholic hierarchy.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam:
A major Viet Cong mortar attack today on Saigon's Tan Son Nhut Air Base has apparently resulted in heavy US casualties and extensive damage to aircraft and equipment (Para. 1). Viet Cong terrorists/saboteurs were active yesterday in the delta province of Ba Xuyen, in Saigon, and in Ninh Thuan Province (Para. 2). Company-strength elements of the US 1st Infantry Division sustained heavy losses yesterday when engaged by an estimated Viet Cong battalion during the conduct of Operation ABILENE in Phuoc Tuy Province (Para. 3). Two ARVN companies have favorably terminated reaction/pursuit Operation TUYEN NHON in Kien Tuong Province (Para. 4). USMC Operation ORANGE has been terminated after 11 days in Quang Nam Province (Para. 5). Two new allied search-and-destroy operations were initiated yesterday in northeast Quang Ngai Province and along the II/III Corps boundary in Binh Thuan and Binh Tuy provinces (Para. 6).

II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:

The government's National Political Congress was convened today; attendance was spotty (Paras. 1-2). Several antigovernment plans and activities were reported, and one "antistruggle" demonstration took place in I Corps today (Para. 3). Increasing strains within the Ky government appear to be developing between those advocating "hard" and "soft" measures for the political crisis. (Paras. 4-5). The government's economic program designed to combat inflation is being postponed (Para. 6).

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V. Communist Political Developments:

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Peking's

People's Daily article of 11 April on the "art of war" appears to have been aimed at countering Soviet charges that China is responsible for provoking unsuccessful revolutions around the world. (Paras. 2-4).

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I. THE MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Viet Cong forces today launched a heavy mortar attack on Tan Son Nhut Air Base, approximately four miles northwest of Saigon. Preliminary MACV reports indicate that three US personnel were killed and 42 wounded (five seriously).

[redacted] Unconfirmed press reports indicate that major aircraft and structural damage may have been inflicted in the assault. The air base control tower, the civilian passenger terminal, the consolidated base personnel office, POL storage tanks, and trucks have all been reported ablaze. One USAF RB-57 and two VNAF C-47s have been reported destroyed. No firm information is presently available on the number of mortar rounds fired, although MACV believes that at least 12-15 rounds were involved. Late MACV spot reports state that a heavy firefight has broken out between friendly reaction forces and enemy troops northwest of the air base.

2. Viet Cong terrorists/saboteurs were active yesterday in the delta, in Saigon, and along Vietnam's south-central coast. In Ba Xuyen Province, 90 miles southwest of Saigon, a grenade was thrown into the 44th ARVN Ranger Battalion compound at Soc Trang, resulting in one Vietnamese civilian killed and 30 wounded (15 ARVN, 15 civilians). Three Viet Cong suspects have been seized. In Saigon, a grenade and a mine were detonated against the 35th ARVN Ranger Battalion compound, killing one ARVN soldier and wounding two soldiers and three civilians. Government security forces later discovered an unexploded Chinese Communist-made 10-pound TNT mine in the compound area. Three suspects have been detained thus far. Finally, in Ninh Thuan Province, 150 miles northeast of Saigon, a Viet Cong plastic explosive charge ruptured an important POL pipeline running from the beach offload point to Phan Rang Air Base. The pipeline was repaired in approximately two hours. Air operations were not affected by the incident.

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Allied Operations

3. Company-strength elements of the US 1st Infantry Division participating in the six-battalion US search-and-destroy Operation ABILENE, southeast of Saigon in Phuoc Tuy Province, were engaged yesterday by an estimated Viet Cong battalion heavily armed with mortars, automatic weapons, and small arms. Forty-eight Americans were killed, 58 wounded, and six missing or captured; enemy losses were not reported. Later in the day, a second US company skirmished with an estimated Viet Cong platoon in the same general area, resulting in US losses of two killed and 12 wounded, and Communist losses of five killed. Yesterday's actions raised cumulative American casualties in the 15-day ground sweep to 63 killed, 134 wounded, and six missing, in contrast to total Viet Cong losses of 49 killed, 21 captured, and 675 suspects apprehended.

4. Operation TUYEN NHON, the ARVN two-company reaction/pursuit ground sweep targeted against an estimated Viet Cong battalion in Kien Tuong Province, near the Cambodian border, has been terminated. Cumulative enemy losses were estimated by US advisers as 228 killed, of which 140 have been confirmed by US body count. In addition, armed helicopter pilots supporting the operation estimated that at least 100 Viet Cong were wounded by air strikes and carried away. Friendly casualties totaled 28 killed (1 US), 24 wounded (2 US), and five missing.

5. Battalion-strength USMC task force elements have terminated search-and-destroy Operation ORANGE southwest of Da Nang, in Quang Nam Province, after 11 days. Viet Cong losses were placed at 57 killed (US body count), six captured, and 53 suspects detained, as against US casualties of 18 killed and 92 wounded.

6. Two new search-and-destroy operations were initiated in South Vietnam yesterday. Two reinforced USMC battalions and three reinforced airborne, ranger, and marine battalions of the 2d ARVN Division launched

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Operation NEVADA/LIEN KET 34 along the northeastern coast of Quang Ngai Province. The enemy order of battle in the operational sweep area is estimated to total 3,800 (21st PAVN Regiment - 2,000; 1st Viet Cong Regiment - 1,400; 195th PAVN AA Battalion - 400). Farther south, Operation AUSTIN II was mounted by three battalions of the US 101st Airborne Division along the II/III Corps boundary in Binh Thuan and Binh Tuy provinces. No enemy contact has been reported thus far in either operation.

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. The government-sponsored National Political Congress was convened in Saigon today, with 92 of some 170 persons invited in attendance. Buddhist Institute representatives, including the inactive southern wing led by Mai Tho Truyen, boycotted the session, as did Archbishop Nguyen Van Binh and other members of the Catholic hierarchy. Three prominent Catholic lay leaders were in attendance, however. Among provincial and municipal councils, 39 of 48 invited were reportedly present. The US Embassy believes it possible that some of those present today may not have been invited, and it is reserving its judgment on the over-all importance of the membership until a list of names of those attending becomes available.

2. The congress was addressed by Directorate chairman General Thieu, who stressed the armed forces' good will and desire to return to purely military duties when a competent and responsible civilian government is established. He implied that the Directorate was willing to accede to a shorter timetable for the establishment of a civilian government, and then asked the Congress to put forth its most realistic ideas for such a government. The congress is scheduled to meet for about three days to consider the question of a civilian government.

3. Saigon was quiet today, although reports reaching the US Embassy indicate that Buddhist leaders may now be planning large-scale demonstrations in the capital on 14 April in protest against the National Political Congress and the continued existence of the Ky government. Elsewhere today, antigovernment demonstrations were reported in Hue and Da Nang. At a press conference in Da Nang today, Colonel Dan Quang Yeu, an antigovernment military commander, expressed his lack of confidence in the Ky government, and at the same time declared that his troops would obey the orders of the new I Corps commander, General Ton That Dinh. A demonstration of some 1,000 persons in the provincial capital of Quang Ngai today was reportedly organized by the VNQDD (Nationalist) Party in support of the Ky government. The theme of the demonstration was apparently to urge the present government to remain in office in order to implement an orderly transfer of power to a civilian government.

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4. Evidence of increasing splits within the Ky government continues to be received. Seven cabinet members have reportedly threatened to resign if the government follows through with its plan to replace National Police Director Lieu. These cabinet members apparently believe that Lieu commands some support from moderate Buddhist leaders, which would be withdrawn should Lieu be ousted. They also favor the return of General Thi to a position of some importance, and are generally unhappy about the lack of influence they have been able to exert on Premier Ky during the current political crisis. The US Embassy views the potential resignation of these cabinet ministers with alarm and is apparently attempting to head off any such mass action.

5. Lieu's dismissal was ordered by Premier Ky after he had been informed that Lieu was still maintaining communications with General Thi. Other members of the government who generally maintain that forceful action should be taken by Ky in regard to antigovernment activity, have previously implied that Lieu could not be trusted.

6. Recent economic developments, aggravated by the political crisis, have led the US Mission to revise its anti-inflationary strategy which was developed in late 1965 and agreed upon at the Honolulu conference. The complete program of measures to combat inflation has not materialized because of port congestion, the attitudes of top-level GVN economic personnel, and GVN reluctance under political attack to implement five of the six agreed tax measures. US officials feel that greater inflation is probable and have recommended the following revisions: improved import procedures, tax increases, financed increases in imports, and a 40-percent wage increase for military and civilian government personnel by June or July.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

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2. The Peking People's Daily on 11 April carried an article on "the art of war" apparently designed to answer Soviet charges that Peking was responsible for provoking unsuccessful Communist revolutions around the world. Asserting that after the publication of Lin Piao's article on "people's war" on 3 September China had been slanderously accused of "calling for a change of world order by force and violence," the article declared that it was the "imperialists" and not Peking who compelled the "oppressed people" to take up arms to secure their own "liberation."

3. People's Daily argues that revolutionaries must work out tactics and strategy appropriate to the situation in which they find themselves--"learning" from the enemy and developing a "range of effective military principles." The Chinese cite their own revolutionary experience as an example but do not present it as more than a general guide--suggesting sensitivity to possible charges that they are treating foreign parties like puppets and demanding compliance with detailed instructions sent out from Peking.

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4. Like the articles early last month concerning "twists and turns" in the road to ultimate victory, this latest one takes note of Communist reverses during recent months. It admits that to ask a revolutionary army to win every battle "is asking the impossible," and asserts that defeats as well as victories would furnish the "revolutionary army" with the necessary experience to defeat the "imperialists" ultimately. The article avoids linking this idea with Vietnam, which was mentioned only once--as one of many countries whose people had correctly chosen to take up arms against the "imperialists." Peking on 10 April asserted that the situation in South Vietnam was "excellent," and it is very unlikely that the Chinese view Vietnam as one of the areas in which the revolutionary struggle is going poorly.

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